Historical Map Making c.1600s - 1800s

Maps have been produced throughout human history using almost any available material. Maps have been found painted on the walls of Neolithic caves and on pieces of wood and bone unearthed at archaeological sites.

Parchment Maps

Parchment is a paper made from animal skins. It began to replace papyrus paper of ancient times in the late Roman period. It was more durable and easier to bind into book form. By the Middle Ages it was the standard material for manuscripts and maps.



Making Parchment

Parchment can be made from the hides of sheep, goats, deer or calves. The hides are soaked in a lime solution that causes the hair to loosen. The hide is placed over a board where the hair is scraped off using a rounded knife. The hide is rinsed and then suspended in a frame. Scraping continues as the parchment dries until all fleshy material is removed from the skin and the desired thickness is achieved. At the same time the skin is stretched and tightened within the frame.





Parchment scraping using a rounded knife.

The back of an animal skin parchment map clearly showing the distinctive outlines and patterns of the animal it came from.



Due to the nature of animal skin, parchment sometimes exhibited abnormalities, distortions, or holes.

The Hardenbergh Patent - 1771



Around 1706 Major Johannes Hardenbergh acquired a vast tract of land in the Hudson Valley. The tract encompassed nearly 2 million acres and included parts of current day Sullivan, Ulster and Delaware counties.



Hardenbergh's purchase was confirmed by a "patent" from the British government in 1708. However, the title was soon under dispute as many questioned the terms of the sale. Parts of the patent were frequently sold and the terms of these sales were complex, leading to frequent court cases that would impede the settlement of the area until long after the Revolution.